MY ADVENTURES WITH A SEEING EYE DOG

Rose Resniek

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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND

My adventures with a SEEING EYE DOG

By ROSE RESNICK

Photo—Romaine—San Francisco

The author, Rose Resnick, National Broadcasting Company (KGO station) featured pianist and lecturer, with her friend Ilsa.

IT was a little more than three years ago, in the withering heat of a New Jersey July, that I first met Ilsa. I had been at the Seeing Eye School in Morristown two days, being sized up by the School staff as to physical and mental resources. Ilsa had been there for three months. With her, seven other dogs had been trained by the same instructor. With me came seven other people without sight, five boys and two girls, to receive for the first time in our lives the first experience of physical freedom. Some of us had been able to go about alone. Particularly the male contingent had known this much independence. But none could ever have had the feeling of complete confidence, the delicious, relaxed certainty of walking alone without fear. And now, here we all were, with a sense that something important was about to happen, aquiver with the impending drama and yet somewhat on the defense of our past self-reliance, as though to say, "Go ahead—I just dare you to make life easier."

For all of us the first meeting with our respective dogs was just as exciting as the arrival of a new-born child, truly a "blessed event." I shall always remember that moment. Panting with heat, she dashed into the room where I sat in suspense and immediately noticed that I was clutching a morsel of meat. As she quickly downed it I gave her a long, critical stroke from head to tail, saying, "What tall, satiny ears, and what a fine body. Mmm—you're very nice. Ilsa, I believe, is the name?"

"Yes. I hear that *you* play the piano, but otherwise aren't half-bad to live with. Where do we go from here?"

"Eventually to a lovely, cool place called San Francisco. But not for one whole month. It seems we are supposed to get used to each other. So come along to my room. I hope you'll find it comfortable."

For her it must have been an anti-climax. The doors, walls, rugs, boys and girls must have seemed unnecessarily polite after living with ninety dogs in the kennels. One

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by a few thousand and you'll have a pretty good idea why the training of purebred dogs for obedience trials has been called America's fastest-growing sport. There are now about forty-two clubs in sixteen states that conduct training classes, sponsor trials and put up cash and trophies for the winners. It all began about eight years ago when Mrs. Whitehouse Walker, a prominent poodle breeder of Bedford Hills, New York, organized the first training class. The American Kennel Club, dogdom's governing body, assumed control of the movement in 1936. Since then more than a thousand dogs, representing 63 breeds, from dachshunds to great Danes, have qualified for at least one title. Today there are probably 5,000 dogs in training. This is good news to dog lovers because it proves their contention that a dog can be taught anything, provided, of course, that its trainer is as intelligent as the dog.

Most obedience-trained dogs are house pets. They're all pedigreed and eligible to compete for blue ribbons at bench shows. Fanciers of purebred dogs cite this fact as the most convincing argument against the notion that mongrels are smarter and more adaptable than blue-bloods. In fact, the whole idea of obedience trials, according to the A.K.C., "is to demonstrate the usefulness of the purebred dog as the companion and guardian of man, and not the ability of the dog to acquire facility in the performance of mere tricks."

Let's assume that you've trained your dog and feel that he's ready for the first test. Most dog shows now include obedience trials on their programs, so you enter your dog in a local show.

You enter the ring with your dog on a leash. You stop and your dog immediately sits down at your left side, as close to you as possible. Then the judge, who rates each exercise on a judging chart, says "Forward," and you walk briskly across the ring with your dog "at heel." You obey the judge's commands of "Right turn," "Left turn," and "About turn" promptly and your dog follows you like a shadow. No tugs on the leash or verbal commands are allowe "Halt," you stop and your d down without being told. Tha first exercise. The next one same except that you remo leash and at one point you te dog to stop, while you keep w Then you call him. He comes a in front of you, then at your co resumes his position at your le

A Test of Obedience

When all the competing dog gone through these exercises brought into the ring together. must sit still for one minute their owners remain at the oth of the ring. If your dog lies visits his neighbors or, worst walks toward you before the is up, his score suffers accord In the final exercise the dogs remain immovable for three mi but this time they must lie dow

If your dog gets 80 or better a possible 100 points in these te receives a qualifying score. An does the same thing at two

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adapts easily, however, in that first year of puppyhood. Besides, we had many interests in common. Food; why God made things like mosquitoes and how funny all the other people were—these topics of conversation soon made us friends. Also amusing were the comments of the passersby, overheard when we were walking together with the trainer.

"Isn't it wonderful of those people to take those poor blind dogs for a walk every day," was one of the prizes. Another remark, overheard while we were waiting for traffic one day, was "How do you suppose those dogs know where to take them? I guess they just give them the name and address."

Actually, of course, no dog knows where you want to go. They are simply taught to recognize directions, such as, "right," "left," "forward," etc. Accordingly, you must be able to direct your dog. In one's own city a few mental observations about relative locations makes this very simple. In a strange city one asks questions just as sighted people are obliged to do. In Morristown the trainer is present at all times when the student is working with his dog. This is in order to avoid any possible misdirection to the dog. A misstep of this kind might interrupt the formation of correct habits and, still worse, might result in forming dangerous ones. The world has recognized the extraordinary intelligence and character of Seeing Eye dogs, but never have I seen anything approaching an estimation of the work of these trainers.

Words can scarcely do them justice. They live at the School of course, and their working hours begin with the training of a new class of dogs, and end when that class is turned out into the world to make its way independently, dog with new master, master with newly-found freedom. What struck me as unique about the Seeing Eye staff was their desire to help every one of its students to be a thoroughly normal member of his community, not only in the matter of getting about unaided, but in every possible avenue of personal activity, eating, picking up dropped objects, posture, caring for and earning money to pay for the dog, and in mental attitudes. So many institutions depend, for their existence, on the perpetuation of the dependence of blind people, that it was almost a shock to come upon one which sincerely worked toward an opposite goal. Impatient as all of us students were to complete the period of training, most of us wept crocodile tears at the moment of departure. So heroic was their spirit, so unsentimental their

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• OUR DOGS *congratulates the above winners in its $100 prize contest as announced in the Summer edition. Prizes were 1st: $25. 2nd: $15 each. 3rd: $10 each. 4th: 10 GLOVERS' Prize Packages.*

His Master's Bar

Doris Day—Atlas Photo

By M. L. GOODWIN

WHEN you are about six weeks old, it is likely your mother will say,

"Well, young fellow, it's time you were finding a nice human and setting up a home of your own."

You protest bitterly that you want to stay in the kennel forever, but she only smiles sadly and quotes a famous bit of doggerel,

"Gather ye humans while ye may,
For time brings only sorrow,
And this same man that smiles today
May get a wife tomorrow!"

It seems that many female humans have a quaint superstition that puppies are bad luck for rugs.

So you start sizing up the various humans. Following your mother's advice and your own instincts, you are rather cool toward tail-pulling children and large females with overly pink muzzles who address you as, "Issums itsy bitsy witsy puppy wuppums!" But finally you find the love of your life and off you go leaving the old dogstead forever.

Early Lessons. In the Rover Museum, there is a life size statue of a human crouched on all fours, listening with wistful eagerness to his dog's commanding bark. It is an inspiration to every dog who sees it because there is nothing a dog appreciates more than a well trained, obedient human.

There is no need to be cruel during the training process. Be gentle but firm—"The iron claw under the velvet paw" as one dog sage has so wisely put it. Try to remember that no human, however intelligent, is quite canine. They may and frequently do growl, but they can't bark.

The first bone of contention is likely to be the somewhat delicate one of certain natural functions and the place of their performance. Here a puppy might as well give in. Later on, you will enjoy waking someone up at three in the morning on the pretext of urgent business outdoors.

On the question of sleeping quarters, however, there should be no compromise. Your human may expect you to sleep out on the porch as a reasonable facsimile of a watchdog. This is silly because a burglar might be looking for a dog on the porch, but if you spring at him from your lair on the davenport you take him completely by surprise. Moreover, if he looks like a mean sort of fellow, you can hide quietly behind a chair but a porch offers little protection.

The larger breeds will find the davenport or the guest bed most suitable. Smaller dogs can be reasonably comfortable in a chair though they should beware of antiques which are far more treacherous than cats.

Many humans will try to confine you to an eating regime of Spartan simplicity. A balanced diet with vitamins floating around in a nauseating way, no candy, no feeding at the table—all that sort of thing. Don't stand for it. Your human balances one piece of pie with another, doesn't he?

Easy Tricks. After the general routine has been satisfactorily established, it is time to teach a few easy tricks which will make you proud to show off your human to your friends.

The Leash Lend Trick. When the two of you go out for a walk with a leash connecting you, be firm about who is doing the leading. He doesn't know, nor can he be expected to know, where the best garbage is, the most amusing cats, the most suitable trees. After a few lunging, tripping walks your human will readily perform the expected trick—that is, he will lend the leash to some that's the last you'll ever se

The Whistling Trick. T smoothly to the performanc next trick. When you are o ing, gallop suddenly away group of your friends who ting at a distance. He will to return (the jealous thi you have already taught him are an artful dodger. So he gin to whistle and call yo loudly. Remain calm and al casionally you may cock y appreciatively to show that him. A trick like this helps away many an otherwise bor

Opening Doors. Doors ar nuisance but humans will st persist in having them. A scr is no real problem—a few lunges and you're through wooden door is a cat of anoth Teach that the door must b the minute you bark beca are a very busy dog and ca any time waiting.

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Loder Photo

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attitude and with such rollicking gayety had they carried out their magnificent aim.

When we got back to our home town the unwitting public almost spoiled the pleasure of our walks together. I was seriously considering attaching to Ilsa's collar a sign in red, extending upwards like a flagpole, reading, "My name is Ilsa. Age almost two. Diet, cereal and meat mostly. I am a German Shepherd. Boxers, Labrador Retrievers, and other kinds of dogs can do this kind of work. I am a female, but males can do this work as well as females. No baby talk, and no petting allowed." Often while we were en route to work, shop, or visit a friend, somebody sooner or later would come up to her and, patting her on the head (a dog should be stroked, never patted on this sensitive part of his body), would say, "You aren't supposed to pet the dear things, are you?" They all meant well. They all thought she was wonderful, but very few trusted her enough not to interfere with her work. As we got out of a street-car one day, for instance, the conductor, against my remonstrances, got out with me, and literally shoved me through two cars which were parked near the curb. Ouch—my shin hit the bumper of one of them. This never would have happened if he had let my dog guide me through them. Another time when we were in a street-car, I warned a curious woman not to look down under the seat, as I was sure that in doing so she would take Ilsa by surprise and cause a reflex bark. Thereupon, the woman instantly did lean over. Sure enough, Ilsa was scared out of her wits by the sudden appearance of a gaping visage and large feathered hat. Out came a yelp of frightened surprise.

One evening, en route to a concert, I heard a child's treble enter the elevator with us.

"Don't let the child touch the dog, please," I said, knowing how children will naively embrace strange animals. As we emerged from the elevator and turned to walk down the hall, round Ilsa's waist went the child's arm. Again, the resounding bark.

"Doesn't the dog like children?" asked the mother. I felt like saying, "You're lucky that bark wasn't a bite," but substituted, "Wouldn't the child resent it if I suddenly put my arm around her waist? Dogs don't like to be taken for granted any more than we do."

Over the noon hour we sometimes find a splurge of park somewhere. Pronto!, we are off to a game of ball. I work up quite a lather throwing, and she gets to sounding like a steam-engine, chasing and retrieving it. One week we went to Yosemite Valley.

We were most fortunate in being guests of Oliver, a man who had been making trips to the Valley on and off for twenty years. The moment we arrived we set out on a hike to Columbia Point. The climb was straight up all the way, but the trail was excellent, soft and full of pine-needles, zigzagging across the rock walls. The peak was a thousand feet above the Valley floor, and there we lunched, soaking up the sunshine and luscious air. Ilsa had taken me up beautifully.

The highlights on Saturday were a swim in the Merced, and a beautiful ride on horse-back to the foot of Vernal Falls. Ilsa had been in for the swim, but decided she would not compete with the horses on the narrow, tree-lined trail. This jaunt was followed by a tour through the government Museum. The Ranger let me penetrate the recesses of the Research Rooms. He actually let me touch the stuffed birds, animal-skins, pine-cones, oo-mah-chas (the Yosemite Indians would be insulted if you called them tepees), models of covered wagons, giant sequoias, etc.

Ilsa and I had another record-breaking excursion to the mountains. This was two weeks at Salmon Lake, a magical spot sixty-five hundred feet up in the Sierras. The area is called Lake Basin on the map because there are thirty-six lakes within five miles of one another. On this trip Ilsa and I were joined by Marjorie, a friend from college. Like us, she is a Nature-worshipper and a climbing enthusiast. We planned our hikes in stages of graduating difficulty, climaxing with the Sierra Buttes, eight thousand six hundred and fifteen feet up. The last lap was an almost perpendicular climb, with narrow ledges to which you had to cling with all fours. At two points there were man-made ladders scaling rock walls. Sierra City, thousands of feet below, would probably be your landing place if you made one wrong move. You may be sure I followed precisely in Marjorie's hand- and foot-holds. The State of California maintains a Lookout Station near the top of the Buttes. Kaspar, the lookout man, was so pleased with our feat of daring that he phoned all the other lookouts on his portable phone when we arrived at the very tip-top of the world. I left Ilsa in Kaspar's little glass house for the last lap because these yawning caverns seemed too ominous for her paw spans. We had a wonderful, barbecued steak with Kaspar and then started for home. Ilsa proved a life-saver that night. It grew dark hours before we were on familiar trails. We had a flashlight but it would have been worthless without Ilsa's advancing shadow, pointing the right way home through the mazes of intersecting paths and bipaths. She loped ahead like an advance scout, and kept coming back to check up on us.

And so in work and play Ilsa keeps me in constant recognition of Keats' immortal line, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." Beautiful she surely is, as everyone knows who has ever seen a healthy, intelligent Shepherd sit in a maximum listening or looking posture. The line from front toes to ear-tips converges with that from rear-rest to ear-tips, forming an erect triangle filled to overbrimming with alert attention and leaping energy. Her patience and efficiency as a guide are constant sources of marvel to me. Never is there a hint of irritability or resentment during the long hours under the seat in theatre or concert, or under the table in restaurant. Day or night she is always ready and glad to go whenever I need her. Wherever we go she leaves a trail of affection and admiration. The only thing which has ever threatened to dilute the pleasure of having her is the intrusion, by question, comment or gesture, by the public. Perhaps this account of our adventures may in some measure help to lessen this difficulty. Ilsa and I, as well as hundreds of other Seeing Eye companions, I am sure will be very glad if it does.

Editorial Note

"The Seeing Eye" asks that those who meet blind persons being guided by their dogs, please observe the following requests:

1. Do not speak to or call the dog.
2. Do not whistle at him.
3. Do not growl, meow or make any animal noises.
4. Do not pet or touch the dog.
5. Do not touch the dog's master.
6. Do not touch the dog's harness or leash (lead).
7. Do not ask innumerable questions.
8. Do not engage a blind person in conversation in a crowded thoroughfare since he must listen for traffic sounds.
9. Do not interfere when a blind person is correcting his dog.
10. Do not offer the dog anything to eat or drink.

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